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WITCH-FEAR IN POST-CONTACT KASKA SOCIETY

By JOHN J. HONIGMANN

ABORIGINALLY the Kaska, like their Northern Athapaskan neighbors, were familiar with sorcery—behavior in which a person with sufficiently strong shamanistic power would steal, or was believed to steal, the wind or soul of a personal enemy and thereby induce illness. Although people who practiced such behavior were feared by the rest of the society's members, they were not usually put to death or otherwise punished. Sorcery, however, was regarded as evil and might therefore automatically lead to punishment in the form of insanity. There is no evidence that sorcery in aboriginal times ever was as prevalent as similar behavior in certain African and Melanesian groups. Following white contact, however, a socially dyscrasic form of behavior appeared among the Kaska which, to distinguish it from the sorcery complex associated with the aboriginal society, may be designated as witch-hunting or witch-fear. The present paper will first present the available evidence from historical sources and informants regarding this form of behavior. Following this an attempt will be made to analyze that material from an historical, psychological, and structural point of view and apply the findings in a universal frame of reference.[1]

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

The Kaska still occupy the territory which they have always inhabited in the memory of the oldest informants. This is the area extending northwest of the Stikine River, British Columbia, Canada, to the divide north of Frances Lake, Yukon Territory, and from the western Cordillera east across the Rocky Mountains (Fig. 1). The main rivers traversing this region are the Liard, Frances, and Dease. The name Kaska is a conventional term adopted from one group of people to classify a number of contiguous tribes speaking closely related dialects. Within the area designated as Kaska several such tribes have been variously distinguished in the literature, but for present purposes the names by which they are locally known today will suffice. In the extreme north are the Frances Lake Indians. Occupying the basin of the Liard, from about the present Highway crossing twenty-three miles above Lower Post to within a hundred miles of that river's source, are the Upper Liard Indians. The

[1] Field work with the Kaska Indians took place from June to September 1944 and from June to December 1945. The work was sponsored by the Department of Anthropology and the Peabody Museum of Natural History of Yale University. To Professors Cornelius Osgood and Irving Rouse are due thanks for critically reading this manuscript. The present account will offer a minimum of general ethnographic detail. A description of the aboriginal culture based on reconstruction is planned for future publication and a psychologically oriented study of the contemporary culture is already partially in manuscript.

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basin of Dease Lake and Dease River is the home of the Kaska proper who may also be distinguished as the Dease River Indians. Extending to the eastern mountains are the Nelson people; until perhaps twenty years ago this tribe occasionally crossed the mountains to trade at Fort Nelson from whence they derive their name. Another branch of the Kaska, the Goat Indians (Espatotena), occupied the area north of the Liard but east of the Rocky Mountains above the mouths of the Beaver and South Nahanni Rivers. They are appar-

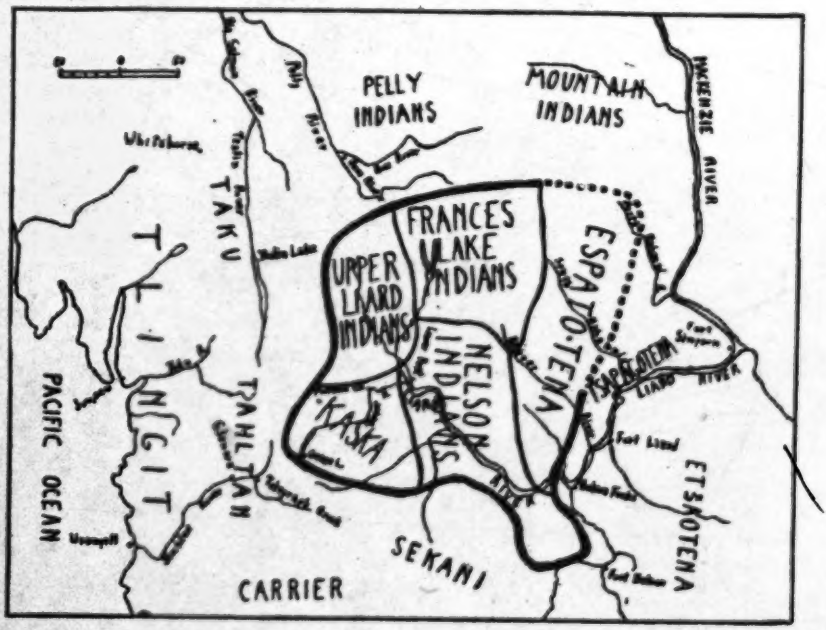

FIG. 1. Map of the Kaska Area Showing Kaska and Adjoining Tribes.

ently Grouard's People of the Mountains or Bad People who consistently traded at Fort Liard after the abandonment of Fort Halkett in 1865 and today do not visit Lower Post.[3]

Surrounding the Kaska are other Athapaskan-speaking groups. Immediately to the south and southwest are the Tahltan and beyond them the Carrier. North of the Frances Lake Indians is the country of the Pelly River people. To the east the Kaska are adjoined by the related Fort Nelson Slave (Etłaotena) and Beaver Indians (Tsapagotena), while across the western

[3] Grouard, n.d., p. 102; Osgood, 1936, p. 13.

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101 Cordillera live the Taku Indians. Beyond these, bordering the Pacific, are the Tlingit.

161 The total population of the Kaska probably never numbered more than about three or four hundred persons. Today about two hundred people constitute the tribes lying between the two mountain ranges.[3]

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

177 Fur traders established their first contacts with the Kaska east of the Rocky Mountains shortly after 1800. In 1821 the Hudson's Bay Company built a post west of the mountains (Fort Halkett) and in 1838 another at Dease Lake. Frances Lake post was founded in 1840. It must be pointed out that these meetings with traders were not soon followed by missionary contact as was the rule in many other parts of the Northern Athapaskan area. In 1872 the discovery of gold along Dease River brought a great influx of miners into the country, most of whom traveled up the Stikine waterway, crossed the portage from Telegraph Creek in Tahltan Indian country, and then went down Dease Lake and River. By 1876 the white population in the latter drainage basin is estimated to have reached about 2,000 people, including a large number of Chinese laborers. By 1887, however, the strangers had nearly all disappeared although a number of Chinese remained to work abandoned bearings. In 1897 and 1898 a second wave of miners entered the area, this time en route to the Klondike gold fields which, because of the exigencies of the climate, many were never to reach. As a result of the large population in these periods trading posts came to be established at the confluence of McDame Creek and Dease River and, shortly before 1890, another where the Dease meets the Liard, the so-called Lower Post.

Certain concomitants of these early contacts have a bearing on the present problem. From the traders and other white men the Kaska were introduced to new varieties of food, tools, and shelter as well as to attitudes that undermined many aboriginal beliefs and behaviors. New semi-permanently occupied shelters, like log cabins, were introduced but do not appear to have taken serious hold until about twenty years ago. Previous to that time, life history data reveal, mobility was still largely maintained with a consequent dependence on temporary camps and game and fish rather than on stores of white food accumulated for winter consumption. Even today the Frances Lake Indians retain considerable dependence on environmental resources, food being highly expensive in a remote outpost like Frances Lake which receives most of its supplies by air. The principal beliefs disappearing before the ridicule of the whites pertained to religion, shamanism, and sorcery. War, of course, was abandoned early in the contact period. Something of the character of the people's reaction to the growing domination of the white society may be

[3] Canada, 1944. Only one or two Frances Lake Indians are included in this census.

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gauged from the fact that between 1908 and 1910 the anthropologist James A. Teit was helping both the Kaska and Tahltan fight the Registered Trap-Line Act of British Columbia. The Indians strongly defended their right to trap anywhere without being limited to fixed trap lines. Their case, however, was lost. According to white informants interviewed at Lower Post, a few Indians about this time also manifested direct hostility to white men and the mysterious disappearance of one white trapper is said to have provoked investigation of some Indians.[2a] 177

In 1924 the Kaska became rather widely known because of the persistent reports of witch killings that emanated from their area. In that year the body of a young Indian, Moccasin, was found in a slough thirty miles below Lower Post. The condition of the corpse suggesting murder, the matter was reported to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who in May of the same year arrived at Lower Post, found the body, and made several arrests. The report of this punitive detachment written by the Superintendent of the British Columbia Provincial Police follows. 674

THE LIARD RIVER MURDER

Last spring the Department of Indian Affairs received word that a young northern Indian had been callously murdered by his fellow-tribesmen. To avoid unnecessary duplication of work and expense, Colonel R. S. Knight, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, commanding the British Columbia District, kindly arranged to have this and other matters investigated by a patrol he was sending in to the British Columbia—Yukon boundary. 674 754

In May, 1924, Inspector Sandys-Wunsch, with two Royal Canadian Mounted Police Constables, reached Fort Liard [Lower Post] via Wrangell, Alaska, and within a few days not only found the remains of Atol, or Moccasin, a young Indian boy who had been brutally tied up and left on the ice to die, but succeeded in arresting Dan Loot,[4] Jimmy Loot, Clem Loot, Big Alec, and a woman named Edie for their share in the offense. These nomadic Indians—Nahanees of Dené stock—firmly believe in magic and witchcraft, and it is because he was suspected of this practice that Atol was cruelly done to death. The whole conduct of this investigation reflects great credit upon the officers concerned, particularly when it is remembered that the natives are singularly uncommunicative when questioned on the subject of their tribal belief.

Inspector Sandys-Wunsch, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, brought his prisoners out and they are now awaiting trial.[5]

All five Indians were tried at Prince Rupert in August 1925. Big Alec was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and the woman, a sister of the Loots brothers, received a ten years' suspended sentence. The three Loots brothers were discharged. Evidence presented at the trial suggested that 682

[2a] See also Dawson, 1887, p. 3.

[4] This family name is pronounced Loots and is so spelled in the latest census rolls. See Canada, 1944.

[5] British Columbia, 1925, p. x14. See also Canada, 1926, pp. 18–19, 24.

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682 "the maiming of human beings, including children, has been commonly practiced amongst the Indians in the northern portion of this province . . . ."[6]

797 In June 1926 another patrol under Inspector Sandys-Wunsch assisted by Seargeant J. R. Paton was sent to Lower Post. With the party was Father E. Allard, O.M.I., en route to begin his missionary work among the Kaska. This party was cordially received by the Indians.

> All without exception were glad to see us return. The Loot family evidently bear us no malice. I must say that their stay in Vancouver [?] has done them no harm; they all were much cleaner both with regard to clothes and themselves, and present a marked contrast to the other Indians who have never been out of Liard.[7]

674 1754 The report of this detachment also contains a reference to witch killings that were believed to have occurred in 1920:

> A case which came under Inspector Wunsch's notice was the alleged murder half a dozen years ago of two Indian children near Porter's Landing on Dease Lake. They were orphans, the age of the elder being variously stated at 10 and 14, and the younger being 5. In 1920 they went to the woods for the winter with a party of Indians, and when the party returned in the spring the children were missing, it being stated that they had died of sickness. Later the wife of one of the Indians left him and made statements that the children had been killed, the elder one in a very cruel manner, by being tied up by the feet head down in cold weather. No motive was stated but the woman making the assertion said that she had been tied up on suspicion of witchcraft. Inspector Wunsch investigated the matter this summer. Some witnesses are dead, the accounts conflicted to some extent, the remains would be difficult to find and identify, the principal actors in the affair are old people . . . so no prosecution has been undertaken.[8]

Writing a year or two later Allard says, "The Upper Liard Indians have the reputation of being addicted to witchcraft. In times of evil or of bad luck they will suspect one or more members of their tribe as the cause of the evil which has befallen them. The suspected individuals are punished and are often done away with."[9]

INFORMANTS' DATA

754 The incidence of witchcraft was explicitly denied for the aboriginal society and a distinction was recognized between a shaman (nudita) and a witch (ʾadatš). An informant pointed out that there were only a few "Indian doctors" left at the time of the outbreaks. Nevertheless, at least in theory, a witch, like an evil shaman (or sorcerer, *tsaie*) also operated on a person's wind but the exact means by which the malevolent influence was transmitted could not be recalled.

674 754 The recorded history indicates that witch-hunting occurred among the Kaska at least as far back as 1920. From informants' data it is possible to ex-

[6] Canada, 1926, p. 24.
[7] Canada, 1927, p. 82.
[8] Canada, 1927, pp. 83–84.
[9] Allard, 1928, p. 26.

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tend the behavior still further in time. About 1900 when one man, Sam Bob, was a small boy, his uncle heard of small children being killed around Lower Post as suspected witches. In order to protect his nephews and nieces from the terror, Sam Bob's uncle took the children across the divide to the upper Pelly River. Sam Bob later heard that two or three years before this incident, or about 1897, a woman from McDame Creek, a Dease River Indian named Old Pretty, came to Lower Post where she introduced the notion of witchcraft which she had learned among the Tahltan. This woman married Captain Joe's brother, Jimmy, and gave birth to a son, Big Johnny, who had three fingers on one hand. The child became ill and subsequently Sam Bob's cousin, Atsi-so ("Soft on the side of his head"), was found at the Hyland River by three white prospectors, dead from an ax blow. This incident is believed to have been the start of the witch-fear movement and from now on witch-killings increased in frequency.

In 1916 or 1917 Teit's Kaska informant, Albert Dease, arrived in Lower Post with freight from Dease Lake. Upon arrival he heard that Casey Jones, a nine-year-old Nelson Indian youth, and two women, one of them the former Mrs. Willy Tsiga, aged about twenty, were tied up in the bush behind the settlement. In the evening, while the Indians were gambling along the river, Albert took a walk near where the Alaska Highway runs today. He heard crying and, upon investigating, discovered the three alleged witches. Albert called his Tahltan boat crew (including Beal Carlick, who is still alive and independently verified these facts) and together they cut the victims' bonds. They took the nine-year-old boy to Telegraph Creek where he remained in school for ten years.[19]

About 1923 an eight-year-old Nelson Indian boy (whose name must be withheld) became suspected of witchcraft following the death of his infant brother. His experiences are given in his own words:

> Finally up to springtime my little brother got sick and they call me witch. I don't know what they mean. Mrs. Piel [i.e., Edie Loots] he tell me that. So mama believe him too; they call me that too. They tie me up. They let me hang by the foot. Oh boy, I wish they do that now! Two night I pretty near die. I heard an owl tell me, "You'll pull through." They untie me, tie me up. I don't know why they do that to me. They ask me lot of questions. Don't know what they ask me for. One time they make me go back pretty near thirty mile, back to old camp. They tell me, "You do that here, this kind of trick?" I say, "I don't know." But Old Madeleine up there; she tell me to tell them "yes." If I don't they're gonna kill me. So I believe her. So I say "Yes" to them. So we went back again to the real camp. My hand tied. My back tired traveling on the road. They guide [guard] me. I don't know what they do that for. We come home. And

[19] According to a Tahltan informant named Beal Carlick, the Indian Agent at Telegraph Creek refused to consider seriously the reports of witch torture on the Upper Liard. Beal therefore took his report to the government agent and magistrate who, after consultation with the Indian Agent, promised to inform the Mounted Police.

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754 my little brother died. And Mrs. Piel—I was laying down, blanket over my head, my hand tied back. First thing I see my ear being cut. Gonna cut my neck—she try—but she give up. Then we start. Every camp I got my hand tied my back. Throw blanket over my head. Finally—I don't know what creek—they bury my brother there—mama pull his sciseors out. While Mrs. Piel cut my ear half, mama finish it. She throw my ear in the fire. I see it burning. Just think I wish I was big. We got to the post. They watch me all the time pretty bad. Lower Post, Mrs. Piel want to kill me again. I got a chance, I'm escape. And his kid, Little Charlie, his boy Sylvester, them two kids tell me, "Let's play boat." And they say, "How to witch?" I don't know what they mean. I see Mrs. Piel come with string. Sure I hid in the woods. They got the whole crowd looking for me but they never found me. Sometimes they pass me right close. When I got a chance again I beat it to other place. [My grandfather] got mad. Say, "You kill that boy I kill the whole works too." Six days out in the woods I come back. Then they left down the river. Mama change his mind. Then she stay Lower Post. I think Frank Best, storeman, found out about me and tell Mounties.

The informant still bears the scars of his torture.

674 754 Shortly after there occurred the murder of Moccasin also in Nelson Indian territory, the Loots brothers belonging to that group. When the Mounted Police reached Little Charlie Slough they found Clem Loots camping there. The body, however, which had been previously discovered by a white man (Fred Allen, who is still alive and verified both the police's and informants' accounts of the incident) was missing. It was ten o'clock at night when the police arrived and asked Clem where the body was buried. The latter would say nothing. The next morning Allen and the police spread out and discovered the youth's grave. They began to dig and found the body wrapped in a gunny sack, the hands bound behind the back. One informant reported that a close relative of the Loots had died just previous to these incidents and the murder was apparently a consequence of this death.

When the police returned in 1926 they employed one of the ethnographer's informants as interpreter to investigate a report of a witch killing that had previously taken place at McDame Creek. This is probably the same incident mentioned in the report of 1927. Liard Tom's brother, Purdy, had married a Bear Lake (Sekani) Indian woman. They had a child, Johnny. Both parents died and, when Johnny was fourteen, Alec Chief became seriously ill. Johnny was tied up for several nights as a suspected witch. In the daytime his bonds were removed but he was fed little. When Alec began to improve the boy died. Alec had previously urged, "Save that boy, don't bother him." At the investigation our informant told the police, "All boys run trap line and stayed out twelve days in cold weather. This boy had sore leg and that made him weak and sick. When the boys come back, Johnny die." The interpreter did not deem it necessary at the time to add that the body had been deposited in a grave so shallow that a grizzly bear is supposed to have discovered and eaten the corpse.

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The pattern that emerges from these reports may be briefly summarized. A serious illness would overtake some member of one of the small semi-nomadic bands. An effort was made to explain the illness in terms of bewitchment and generally some child or youth of either sex was fixed upon as the guilty party. Often the child confessed to the crime which he did not understand. "Kid not smart," Sam Bob explained. "You talk to kid, 'You witch?' Maybe say, 'Yes.' That kid big, he wouldn't speak a word." Sometimes the confessed witch was killed or else he might starve to death. If the suspect refused to admit his guilt he was tortured until he confessed. The commonest means of torture seems to have been by tying up the suspected individual, sometimes hanging him up by the heels and starving him. The remarkable thing that comes out of the data is that the captivity and torture were often undertaken by a member of the suspect's family, again either a man or a woman. A mature person often sought to escape the charge of bewitchment by leveling suspicion on a child. During periods when witch-fear was prevalent people were afraid of being accused of the deed and of having guilt placed on their children. Mutual suspicion was rife and people watched their children carefully.

From this synthetic reconstruction it is clear that the Kaska's belief in witchcraft is best described as witch-fear, since there is no evidence of any Indian ever actually practicing witchcraft nor were the forms of such behavior apparently even ideally patterned in great detail. Thus witch-fear for the Kaska may be defined as an attempt to fix blame for malignancy upon one person for some definite injury to another. Certain other features of Kaska witch-fear may be pointed out. Very often it was not the supposed victim who sought to fix this blame but his relatives and friends. Furthermore all suspicion of witchcraft was localized within the community and often within the family. Blame did not depend upon any previous expression of enmity between victim and witch, for frequently suspicion fell on a child who could not easily have originated or been the subject of such hostility. Finally there was no elaboration of techniques for countering the attack of witchcraft. Shamanism had practically disappeared from the society and oracles were not consulted to determine witches. The sole remedy appeared to lie in securing the confession of the witch and/or bringing about his death. It therefore follows that witchcraft was not a commonplace or "normal" phenomenon in Kaska society as it is, or was, among the African Azande or California Yokuts and Western Mono.[11]

Although Dan, Jimmy, and Clem Loots are still living in Lower Post, efforts to persuade them to talk about witch-fear or witchcraft were unsuccessful. A number of other informants expressed impatience when questioned about this behavior and pointed out that they knew nothing of witches. They

[11] Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Gayton, 1930, p. 409.

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754 rather consistently maintained that it was white people who constantly spoke of "witches." Indians, it was asserted, knew nothing of this phenomenon. Sam Bob said, "What you call witch come from someplace—Tahltan, Tlingit maybe. That story come to Lower Post, so people believe it . . . . Before that start, lot of people die off." Asked what people had died from he replied, "Dysentery maybe. When I was kid lot of people die off . . . and they believe witch does that." This man ascribed witch-hunting to an older generation. "I know old people no good. Look they die off. I tell one old man like that. I say, 'Think about thirty years ago, what you did on your nephew.' 'Well,' he said, 'Not my fault. Somebody else's fault.' Gee, they killed lots of people that time—maybe hundreds of kids. Where now Watson Lake Airport, lots of kids get killed in there."

Knowing the Kaska's unfamiliarity with the western system of numeration one will immediately discount this estimate of "hundreds." The actual scope of witch-fear is difficult to reconstruct, yet when the remembered cases of torture and killing are considered against the size of the population it will be appreciated that the phenomenon achieved serious proportions. Today the attitudes that went to support witch-hunting have almost entirely disappeared. In the winter of 1944–45, however, when a series of dysentery epidemics spread through the Kaska territory, a girl visiting Lower Post from the Nelson River region is reported to have said, "The people pretty bad yet . . . they talk about witch."

On the basis of the ethnographic data attention may now be directed to attempting to discover an explanation for this witch-fear. For purposes of convenience historical explanations will first be considered separately from psychological and structural theories. Actually all of these types of explanation are inseparable and interdependent and any final analysis must consider all in conjunction.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA. I, HISTORICAL

754 171 A survey of the circumstances related to the introduction of witch-fear among the Kaska may well begin by an attempt to spot the distribution and degree of development of similar behavior among tribes adjacent to the Kaska. From this procedure it may be determined if Kaska witch-fear is an indigenous phenomenon or if, following the informants' statements, it can be shown to have been derived from outside the area where its practice was earlier or more developed. We will discuss in order the Tahltan, Carrier, Pelly River, Slave, Taku, and Tlingit groups.

A reference to Tahltan belief in witches is reported by Teit who says, "Witchcraft is believed in, witches being a class distinct from shamans."[8] The same distinction is made in Emmon's report of an earlier visit to the Tahltan about 1906. He writes:

[8] Teit, 1912, p. 486.

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If after several visits from the shaman the patient does not improve, the shaman tells the family that a witch spirit possesses him, and that until it is liberated nothing can be accomplished; then after further payment he points out or reveals in song the person who has bewitched the patient. In thus indicating the witch, an enemy or an inoffensive person is usually made responsible, and he is forthwith bound and placed in an outhouse without food. If the person recovers, the accused person may be liberated, but if he dies, the one charged with sorcery may be killed.[13]

The distinction between witches and shamans noted by these two observers corroborates the Kaska data.[14]

A witch killing was reported for the Tahltan Indians by Sam Bob, a Kaska Indian, who has made a number of trips to Telegraph Creek where he is well known. One night Joe Campbell (whose son, Dick, is still living) missed his classificatory sister's son. He walked to a water-hole in the river and found blood stains on the ice. Reporting the matter to the authorities at Telegraph Creek, he accused an Indian whose wife was dying of having perpetrated the youth's murder. The accused man was convicted and hung. These events probably took place about thirty years ago.[15]

For the Sekani and Carrier Indians living in the area northeast and south of the Stikine River respectively, the ethnographic literature contains no reference to witchcraft that may be used to distinguish this behavior from sorcery.

From immediately north of the Kaska, evidence of witch hunting is contained in a manuscript written by a trapper, Poole Field, in 1913.

> Amongst the Pellys and Little Salmons the belief in witches and casting of spells was very strong up to a few years ago when contact with white people and the fear of the police practically put a stop to any serious crimes. The Medicine men were the very leaders of this. They were supposed to have the power to detect a witch, when he or she were overpowered and tied up hands and feet and then hung up by the heels to a tree.
>
> Then the doctor would make medicine over them and sing and dance, asking them if things looked different in any way. If the supposed witch said no she was left hanging there till he did. Then he was taken and killed.
>
> Only in cases when the person was supposed to be a witch and had very powerful relations and they gave the doctor presents to doctor over him did anyone get off from being killed.[16]

Here again we find a distinction between the functions of shamans and

---

[13] Emmons, 1911, pp. 113–114.

[14] But the distinction was apparently overlooked by Callbreath (cited by Dawson) who wrote: "The vicious and unnatural practices of these people appear to be traceable in all cases to the teaching of their medicine-men or witches, in whom they believe implicitly. (Dawson, 1887, p. 6.)

[15] When questioned, Beal Carlick, a Tahltan, denied all knowledge of witch-fear ever occurring in the Tahltan area. [16] Field, 1913, p. 4.

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754 witches. Any distribution of witchcraft north of the Pelly River is not reported, although this area presents a large gap in ethnographic knowledge.

171 East of the Kaska the Etšaotena, a Slave group, do not appear to have been familiar with a belief in witchcraft as distinct from sorcery but they did fear the Kaska sorcerers, perhaps interpreting the rumors of witchcraft which reached them in the frame of reference of traditional sorcery.[17]

For the Taku Indians west of the Upper Liard Indians there is also a lack of ethnographic material which might be examined for evidence of a belief in witches. Farther west, however, along the Pacific coast of Alaska, the ethnographic data on witchcraft represent largely historical reconstruction but the pattern is so similar to Kaska practice as to warrant consideration. According to Swanton,

> When caught, the wizard was tied up for eight or even ten days without food or drink, unless he confessed to the deed and agreed to find the witching medicine. After he had brought this out he waded in the sea up to his shoulders and scattered it. If he refused to confess he was liberated at the end of the time given but not unfrequently he died before its expiration. Sometimes, however, his friends interfered and bloodshed resulted.[18]

In practicing witchcraft, the witch among the Tlingit is supposed to have secured an article of the proposed victim's clothing—some hair, spittle, or fish bone from which the latter had eaten. "Then he made an image of his body, which he treated in the way he wanted the living person to suffer, making it a mere skeleton, to bring on emaciation; deforming the hands, to destroy the ability of a woman at weaving, etc."[19]

According to Jones' report of the Tlingit, diseases, "especially those of a lingering and wasting nature, like consumption, are regarded as the work of malevolent witches." Two techniques for effecting a cure were recognized, expelling "the evil spirit that possessed the sick" and locating and killing the witch.[20]

> In case the sick recovered, no witch was hunted. On the other hand, if the patient grew worse and showed signs of dying, then the wily doctor evaded responsibility by asserting that a witch was hindering his work and must be found and killed.[21]

Jones remarks that an ineffectual person was usually selected as the witch. "The victim was first reviled, reproached, brutally and shamefully treated, and

[17] Honigmann, 1946. There is a possibility that the distribution of witch-fear may not have traversed the whole eastern Kaska area. Any answer to this question must wait until ethnographic materials become available for the eastern Espato-tena. Grouard's reference to a western dwelling tribe who around 1865 were known as Bad People has already been pointed out. Such a designation is too typical of relations between different dialect groups of Northern Athapaskans to admit the possibility that the reference may have been conditioned by reports of witchcraft.

[18] Swanton, 1908, pp. 469–470. [19] Swanton, 1908, p. 470.

[20] Jones, 1914, p. 514. [21] Jones, 1914, p. 156.

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subsequently put to death." Torture included tying the alleged witch to stakes before the rising tide, or in the forest "for wolves to devour." A suspect was also allowed to starve to death. Sometimes the limbs of suspects "were tied to their bodies and then they were thrown naked on a bed of thorns."[22] Swanton, Jones, and Pinart all speak of Tlingit shamanism as apparently distinct from witchcraft.[23]

Accepting the statements of informants that belief in witchcraft reached the Kaska from outside of the area, it seems extremely likely that such attitudes were transmitted from the Tlingit, where the witchcraft behavior was (at least ideally) more firmly developed and, from its more extensive relations with the shaman complex, apparently persisted from aboriginal times. From the Pacific coast the attitudes passed to the Tlingits' immediately adjacent neighbors, the Tahltan (and possibly the Taku) and then made their way across the Cordillera to the Pelly River and western Kaska Indians.[24] In this process of transmission the techniques of witchcraft were apparently lost but the important underlying fear of the witches' activities as well as their torture, death, and selection from "ineffectual persons," namely children, were retained. From Sam Bob's statement, "What you call witch come from some place—Tahltan, Tlingit maybe" and his report of a woman coming to Lower Post with witch-fear learned from Tahltan sources it would appear that the Tahltan were middlemen in this transmission. The Tahltan had long been intermediaries in the fur trading carried on between the Tlingit and the interior Indians although in early days the privilege of trade with the Tahltan had been reserved for only a few Tlingit families.[25] Intercourse between these tribes tended to intensify when the Tlingit became the boatmen who, during the gold rushes following 1872 and 1897, operated up the Stikine River visiting Glenora and Telegraph Creek. On the other hand the absence of witch-fear phenomena to the east of the Kaska, among the Fort Nelson Slave, and to the south, among the Sekani studied by Jenness[26] proves conclusively that the behavior could not have reached the Kaska from those tribes. Further light on the mechanics of transmission will undoubtedly be gained through ethno-

[22] Jones, 1914, pp. 156–157. See also Oberg, 1934, pp. 154–155.

[23] Swanton, 1908, p. 464; Jones, 1914, pp. 155–156; Pinart, 1872, p. 810. Stevenson also reports a difference between the shaman and an inferior medicine man whom he also calls a "wizard sorcerer." (Stevenson, 1893.)

[24] Field work may uncover an alternative explanation for the transmission of witch-fear to the Taku and Pelly River Indians. According to Jenness the original Athapaskan population of these tribes died out and the Taku region around Teslin Lake was taken over by Tlingit people who were later joined by Frances Lake Indians in moving to the country of the upper Pelly and Ross Rivers. (See Jenness, 1932, p. 396; also Field, 1918.) According to Liard Tom, a Kaska informant, a few Indians from Lower Post were permanently attracted to the Pelly River country by the cheaper prices prevailing at the trading post established on Ross River around 1899.

[25] Dawson, 1887, p. 4. [26] Jenness, 1937.

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754 177 graphic work with the Tahltan and other Pacific-drainage Athapaskan groups.

In view of the statements that the practice of witch hunting was absent in aboriginal Kaska society it may be expected that this attitude appeared in the area between 1820 and 1900. A survey of the historical background has already revealed two great movements of white people up the Stikine waterway, one starting in 1872 and another in 1897. The reports of Dawson, who was in the country about 1887, make a passing reference to witchcraft among the Tahltan. Therefore it seems reasonable from all available evidence, including informants' data, to ascribe the introduction of witch-fear in Kaska territory to the closing years of the nineteenth century.

At this period other occurrences probably had an influence in conditioning the acceptance of such beliefs. Kaska culture was undergoing a period of drastic change. The adaption of the Indians was being severely tested by the influx of people who by their numbers were probably dispersing the game on which the Indians depended in large measure for survival. Never comfortable with strangers, the people were now being exposed to all manner of contacts, some of which were certainly not courteous and considerate.[27] In addition must be considered the Indians' exposure to introduced illnesses, which were taking a heavy toll of life. Even today the people blame the white man for the origin of tuberculosis and colds. The study of the influence of these historical changes on the adoption of beliefs in witchcraft is part of the psychological problem to which attention will now be directed.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA. II, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND STRUCTURAL

154 182 A study of the psychological functions of Kaska witch-fear must answer several related questions. In the first place why, if as is known, the Kaska as well as the Tahltan had a knowledge of and contact with the Tlingit going back to aboriginal times, was the belief in witchcraft not accepted long before? Here again historical factors must be examined before any psychological explanation need be attempted. The superimposition of witchcraft belief on patterns of shamanism among the Tlingit suggests that those people had themselves only developed attitudes of witchcraft relatively recently. Furthermore *intense* contact with Tlingit society probably did not occur for the Kaska until the close of the nineteenth century when interaction with the Tahltan probably also occurred on a friendly rather than, as had previously been the rule, on a hostile basis. The question therefore becomes limited to the predisposing conditions which influenced the acceptance of a belief in witchcraft in relatively modern times. It may now be asked, what problems did a belief in witchcraft satisfy in Kaska society at the time of its acceptance and what were the functions of this belief?

[27] For a picture of the type of men who went on the Klondike trail see Dennis, 1898, p. 453; also Stratford, 1912.

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Without attempting to formulate a complete theory of witchcraft, it may be pointed out that a belief in the potential malevolence of other people, while not always socially disintegrating, always suggests a sense of insecurity governing interpersonal relations. Such a theory is primarily deductive and is derived from previous anthropological investigations of witchcraft, clinical psychology, and psychoanalysis.[23] Its validity for the present problem will depend entirely on its ability to explain the facts of Kaska witch-fear. The components of psychological insecurity derive from states of anxiety which can be divided into two types, first, primary anxiety that is a product of some early traumatic situations of childhood and is retained throughout life and, second, situational anxiety which is derived from contemporary situations that frustrate the individual's feeling of safety in his environment. The two types of anxiety are closely related and it seems likely that any considerable degree of primary anxiety will create a low threshold for situational anxiety. The accumulated total insecurity will in turn seek release through impulses of aggression or hostility of which witch-fear is a projection.[24]

In order to ascertain the nature of the anxieties likely to occur in Kaska individuals, reference must be made to Kaska personality as it was studied during the period of field work, 1944–45. The validity of this method may be briefly demonstrated. The basic outlines of personality, it is now generally agreed, are established in childhood, specifically in those social situations in which the child derives characteristic attitudes toward the world and himself from his relationship with adult members of the family and other members of his society. Since the patterns governing these primary situations change slowly (no evidence could be obtained of any major change in socialization patterns in the past few decades), it seems safe to assume that basically Kaska personality was not radically different twenty-five or even fifty years ago from what it is today.

From an analysis of Kaska culture it is possible to prove, first, the existence of personality factors which provide a considerable degree of readiness to react with situational anxiety and, second, to isolate certain historical conditions which, by arousing strong situational anxiety, were predisposing to the acceptance of witchcraft beliefs as defined above. To phrase the second point somewhat differently, observations of Kaska behavior enable the prediction that certain specific circumstances will almost certainly arouse anxiety in the Kaska Indian. Such circumstances include any situation requiring an assertive

[23] Although among the Navaho Kluckhohn believes the euphoric effects of witchcraft to outweigh the dysphoric, he sees a function of witchcraft to be "the objectification and alleviation of displaced anxieties arising from the general situation of the Navaho or from the special situation of a particular Navaho at a particular time." (Kluckhohn, 1944, pp. 40, 50.)

[24] It is impossible to document the sources for this theory which borrows freely from many writers. The interested reader will quickly recognize the influence of Horney, Levy, Dollard, Kardiner, Maslow, and others.

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155 approach to problems of adaptation to which traditional solutions cannot be readily applied.

155 A basic anxiety conditioning relatively low resistance to traumatic situa-
854 tions develops primarily from the relationship of the Kaska mother to her
855 child. In the first two years of life the infant receives extremely favorable treatment. The mother responds readily to the baby's discomforts; crying is quickly rewarded, while affection and attention are consistently displayed. Between two and three years of age the mother's behavior undergoes a change. Whether or not another baby is born, the mother becomes emotionally more remote and self-occupied and her relationship to the child becomes one that is best described as emotional rejection. Crying is scolded, and demands for affection to which the child has become accustomed are ignored. It is not unusual to see four- and five-year-old children who have been hurt crying by themselves rather than seeking emotional comfort from a parent or other adult. Thus from a period of affectional demonstrativeness the Kaska mother returns to the pattern of emotional aloofness that is characteristic of most interpersonal relationships within the society. This hiatus in development sets up a number of dynamics in the child's personality but the only one with which we are concerned is a deep-seated anxiety and feeling of insecurity toward the world, leading to an ambivalent attitude toward all intense emotional relationships.[20] This basic anxiety remains with the individual throughout life and is responsible for the inadequate strength of the Kaska ego when confronted by crises.

754 At the time of the witch-fear outbreaks the Kaska found their survival
182 imperiled. This threat came from several sources which have already been
154 mentioned; the influx of strangers had upset the balance of game, new ill-
178 nesses were introduced, and an adequate standard of living was coming to depend heavily upon the intensive trapping of skins to exchange for the white man's foodstuffs. All of these changes presented problems of existence for which traditional solutions were inadequate. Hunting required additional effort and was accompanied by more uncertainty than ever before while the belief in the efficacy of charms, songs for luck, and other hunting ceremonials had disappeared; illness, for which the Kaska were never well equipped, was increasing while native therapeutics, notably the belief in shamanism, had already broken down. Trapping required degrees of foresight, initiative, effort, and long-range planning for which the Indians were (and still are) psychologically unprepared. On the other hand, the rewards of trapping, the most important of which was an adequate supply of food that would reduce the necessity of hunting, were unattainable so long as this ability was not efficiently

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[20] These conclusions are well demonstrated in the Rorschach situation in which the Kaska subject displays an intense fear of the close interpersonal relationship that administration of the test presents to him, a pronounced reluctance to respond to internal and external emotional stimuli (color shock), few movement responses, and deep-seated primary anxiety (shading shock).

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managed. For an assertive and basically confident people these problems would perhaps not have been too catastrophic. Kaska resourcefulness, however, is limited to relatively familiar situations or those which do not require a prodigious expenditure of energy and too severe a disruption of normal routines. In novel critical situations the Indian reveals a tendency to passivity and procrastination. These behaviors, totally inadequate as defenses in the acculturation situation, simply aggravated adaptive crises when they were applied to hunting, illness, and trapping. The inevitable result was the arousal of secondary frustration and anxiety.

It was this anxiety, leading to interpersonal difficulties and hostility (which the Kaska are unable to express directly) which was the condition predisposing the society to a favorable reception of witch-fear. Sickness, always a conflict situation for a people dependent on mobility to survive, was the area in which the introduced pattern became readily integrated. Witch-fear solved the emotional problems of frustration and anxiety by offering a channel for the discharge of their derived hostility.

Although this was the general predisposing condition facilitating the reception of witchcraft, certain structural congruities to witchcraft must not be overlooked.[31] Without an awareness of the possibility of effecting malevolence sympathetically or contagiously, such as existed in the former belief in sorcery, witchcraft would have had greater difficulty in taking hold. Torture also had a place in the aboriginal way of life, enemy captives taken in intertribal warfare having been even more callously treated than were suspected witches. Finally the social structure of the group must be regarded as having been functionally related to the introduced attitudes by making it possible for suspicion and fear to exist between even proximate relatives and neighbors.

Kaska society has always been marked by extreme atomism with a minimum of social identification extending beyond the family. Even within the family authority was weak but deference highly emphasized. Cooperation was rare and always on an individualistic and voluntary basis. The largest and best definable unit of social structure beyond the family was the mobile band having the nuclear family as the center around which were grouped grandparents, sons-in-law and, occasionally, other relatives. Such bands were sociologically cemented by the emotional bonds of primary kinship relations. Beyond these bonds affinal kinship, personal friendship, congeniality, and common membership in an exogamous moiety[32] operated to maintain social relations, but such

[31] We here use "structural" in somewhat the same sense that Kluckhohn has spoken of "structural analysis" as "an investigation of 'functional dependencies'" or "the interrelation of parts" of a culture, but excluding those psychological factors which are commonly referred to "personality." This is functionalism in Radcliffe-Brown's rather than Malinowski's sense of the term. (Kluckhohn, 1944, p. 45; Radcliffe-Brown, 1946.)

[32] Dual organization did not extend to the eastern Nelson Indians and probably not to the Espato-tena.

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ties were weak and unformalized. When a band through marriage secured members of another dialect division (i.e., tribe) the affinal kinship ties were apt to be riddled by considerable distrust. Even today relations between dialect groups are apt to be strained although considerable marriage has taken place between them. Thus on its peripheries the band was extremely unstable and possessed few mechanisms for cementing relationships with other bands. Between such units only more distant blood and affinal kinship ties operated, and here the emotional factor needed to reinforce kinship ties in a society where interpersonal relations are not strictly formalized was even more minimal. Covert interpersonal hostility was congruent to and almost inevitable in such a social structure wherein the individual literally felt he could depend on nobody but himself and in which mistrust rapidly mounted beyond the nuclear family. Obviously, therefore, relatives and neighbors often failed to inspire confidence or security and numerous possibilities for suspicion of malevolence were available. In the absence of any organized chieftainship such antagonisms were primarily subject to individual control in accordance with the ideals of the society.

This analysis has not yet directly explained one important feature of Kaska witch-fear. Why was suspicion of witchcraft so often directed against children? In part the answer may lie in the fact that adults often circumvented accusations by placing the blame for alleged bewitchment on defenseless children. A psychological explanation underlying such behavior can be found in the fact that the Kaska's timidity in interpersonal relations and the correlated deference patterning manifest adult relations made it undesirable to arouse direct hostility.[33] Children, therefore, were safer targets for accusations. Finally we must look to the society's attitudes toward children. The inhibition of demonstrative affection to children has already been pointed out and would seem to point to ambivalence as regards children. An interpretation of conflicting attitudes toward offspring is strengthened by the evidence that some women do not want children and this is related to expressions of masculine striving in some female members of the contemporary society. There are more socially patterned techniques for inducing sterility and contraception than there are means of promoting fecundity. It becomes conceivable, therefore, that a woman who was emotionally withdrawn and unconsciously ambivalent in her attitude toward children could assist in the torture of her own or a relative's child. Emotional rejection, it must be pointed out, is not correlated with conscious hostility toward children and of course not all parents demonstrated hostility to children. Many greatly feared the hysterical outbreaks of witch-fear and witch-hunting and sought to protect their families by removing them from the area.

[33] Kluckhohn has found fear of witchcraft among the Navaho to be associated with only a slight incidence of overt interpersonal aggression. (Kluckhohn, 1944, p. 53.)

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COMPARISONS

From the foregoing analysis it is apparent that Kaska witch-fear in part owed its instigation to the effects produced on the society by the introduction of new illnesses, the dispersal of game, increased problems of adaptation, and the growing domination of white people. As a product of stress, the belief in interpersonal malevolence is comparable to other social excrescences which have been exhibited whenever traditional ways of living have been threatened or blocked by unavoidable circumstances.

Examples of cultural developments instigated by crises involving total societies are available from many parts of the world. Thus among the South African Lobvedu the introduction of competitive economic patterns to this society, which was organized on an intensely cooperative basis and geared to mutually beneficial, reciprocal, economic relationships has led to an increase in the use of luck-magic as well as sorcery.[34] Also in South Africa, the imposition of British rule about 1857 provoked a dyscrasic movement in some tribes characterized by the destruction of the cattle on which so much of the economic and social life depended.[35] In North America, social reactions to the disturbances attendant upon culture contact have often been identified as revivalistic, messianic, or renaissant movements.[36] The developments in Temple Mound II period, with the introduction of a ceremonial cult having revivalistic functions, are an illustration of a phenomenon instigated by adaptive difficulties coincidental with the period when European pressure on the Atlantic seaboard was causing the dislocation of many eastern tribes.[37] Archeological and ethnohistorical material from the Lower Columbia River suggests that here too population displacement and a sudden upsurge in mortality around the beginning of the nineteenth century led to the development of a "death and revival cult."[38] Similarly renaissant movements like the Prophet Dance, Ghost Dance, and Peyote Cult have been demonstrated as related to periods of acute stress which imperiled survival and social organization.[39] In Barber's words, the behaviors of these cults were essentially expressive of "hope" developed as compensations for "harsh times" and "deprivation."[40] In Kaska witch-fear, however, this optimistic note is lacking. Among the Navaho, where renaissant movements like the Ghost Dance were impossible, Kluckhohn reports that between 1875 and 1890—after Fort Sumner—there occurred a "maximum

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[34] Krige and Krige, 1943, p. 38. [35] MacDonald, 1890, pp. 280–281.

[36] Revivalistic movements are by no means limited to North America. They occurred in South Africa and also among the Maori following British rule. (MacDonald, 1890, pp. 280–281; Kerry-Nichols, 1886, pp. 201–202.)

[37] Ford and Willey, 1941, pp. 357–359; Krieger, 1945. I am indebted to Dr. Rouse for this and the following illustration. [38] Strong, 1945.

[39] Spier, 1935; Lesser, 1933; Kroeber, 1925; Lowie, 1924, pp. 193–195.

[40] Barber, 1941, pp. 668–669.

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000 suspicion of witchcraft, of witchcraft trials and executions, probably also of actual witchcraft practice. . . . This was, of course, precisely an epoch when the equilibrium of Navaho society, destroyed by war and captivity, was in a troubled state of readjustment." Kluckhohn points out the significance of the fact that the outbreak of witchcraft did not come at the height of the society's misfortune but after a period in which some readjustment had already been attempted.[41]

It is worthwhile pointing out that where some other Northern Athapaskan communities reacted to the difficulties of acculturation with excrescent social phenomena, these did not take the dyscrasic form manifested in witch hunting. Groups like the Carrier, Sekani, Fort Nelson Slave, and Satudene in this period developed prophet cults with essentially positive goals. The similarities of some of these movements to the Prophet Dance to the south have been pointed out by Spier.[42] The Kaska at least heard of local prophets from their neighbors, and some Upper Liard Indians even participated in such a movement at Ross River less than forty years ago.

Whether culturally renaissant, like the Ghost Dance and Peyote; religiously revivalistic, like the Athapaskan prophet movement, or socially dyscrasic, like suspicion of witchcraft, all such social excrescences constitute native reactions to situations of compelling crises. The instigation to such movements is illuminated by Leighton's statement: "Out of the confusion of a community under stress there is likely to arise a single radical system of belief which may or may not bring a new stability, but which will bring to a large section of the population a sense of at least temporary relief from stress."[43] In each case, however, the inception of such a system is determined by historical, psychological, and cultural factors peculiar to a specific cultural configuration.

[41] Kluckhohn, 1944, pp. 64, 70–71.

[42] Spier, 1935, pp. 28–29, 36–37, 62–63. See also Jenness, 1943, pp. 547–551; Jenness, 1937, pp. 64–67; Honigmann, 1946, pp. 132–134; and Osgood, 1931. A white man in Lower Post, George Adsit, also reported such a movement among the Taku. The prophet preached to the people but while doing so he was not permitted to carry a knife on his person. In many respects this Taku cult resembles the movement which Ray has described for northeastern Washington. (Ray, 1936.)

[43] Leighton, 1945, p. 302. Castiglioni has expressed the same idea somewhat differently. "In periods of economic depression, after grave sufferings, when the critical faculty appears diminished, the emotional necessity for new trends of ideas comes to the surface. It is then that as a collective, ethical, and constructive influence the religious idea points to all the miraculous physical and spiritual paths of salvation and of healing, and prompts attempts to concentrate the emotional faculties on the single aspiration for a better life on earth. When that does not appear possible, it leads to aspiration for a future life . . . . On the other hand, other antiethical and antisocial attempts at revolutionary adventures occur: the rise of the Antichrist against the Messiah, an alliance with evil forces when the help received from religious faith or from moral and social laws appears insufficient. Diabolical magic, the covenant with the Devil, assume an infinite number of names and guises. It is an attempt to overthrow all moral laws, to attack all constituted orders, and to destroy individuals or groups of individuals, families, clans, or ethnic groups, or races or social classes that seem to hinder this new program." (Castiglioni, 1946, pp. 2–3.)

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CONCLUSION

Much has been written about the Northern Athapaskans' supposed predilection to borrow from the cultures of their neighbors. Some of the instances cited of such alleged transmissions can now be demonstrated to rest on an incorrect interpretation of what meager evidence was available when these accounts were written, although the adaptability of a people like the Kaska remains a well-defined charasteristic. With regard to witch-fear, it is believed that the aboriginal absence and relatively late introduction of the behavior in question have been adequately demonstrated historically. Witch-fear seems to have originally developed among the Pacific Coast Tlingit and from there made its way to certain inland Athapaskan tribes, including the Kaska. In the case of the Kaska, this transmission probably utilized the Tahltan as middlemen.

The Kaska did not receive witch-fear without being prepared for this behavior. Witch-fear functioned to relieve the anxiety and derived hostility generated in a basically anxious personality by conditions of acculturation, and was possible in a society that lacked strong organization beyond primary kinship ties. Witch-fear may be diagnosed as a reaction to social stress and is therefore comparable to other reactions manifested by societies following devastating effects of acculturation.

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